

# Former SBC presidents unite against gay marriage

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COLUMBUS, Ohio (BNG)—Sixteen former [Southern Baptist Convention](#) presidents released a statement urging churches to disregard any legal definition of marriage as anything other than the union of a woman and a man.



Ronnie Floyd,

president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of Cross Church in Arkansas, emphasizes a point during the press conference with past SBC presidents. (SBC Photo By Adam Covington)The statement, drafted in a conference call organized by former SBC President Jack Graham, pastor of [Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano](#), encouraged “all Southern Baptist pastors, leaders, educators and churches to openly reject any mandated legal definition of marriage and to use their influence to affirm God’s design for life and relationships.”

“We will not accept, nor adhere to, any legal redefinition of marriage issued by any political or judicial body, including the United States Supreme

Court," the former presidents said. "We will not recognize same-sex marriages, our churches will not host same-sex ceremonies, and we will not perform such ceremonies."

They also pledged "to support those who stand for natural marriage in the corporate world, the marketplace, education, entertainment, media and elsewhere with our prayers and influence, and resources."

Current SBC President Ronnie Floyd said he asked Graham, who held the office in 2003-04, to coordinate the joint statement when they were together in Washington last month during the National Day of Prayer. Graham was this year's honorary National Day of Prayer chairman.

In their joint statement, released at a press conference at the SBC annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio, former SBC leaders said they "cannot and will not affirm the moral acceptability of homosexual behavior or any behavior that deviates from God's design for marriage."

"We also believe religious freedom is at stake within this critical issue," they added, and "that our first duty is to love and obey God, not man."

"No one wants to be disobedient to just laws, but anything we perceive, as we look through lens of Scripture, to be unjust in terms of our Christian commitment and devotion and practice, we will oppose that, and we will oppose it strongly," Graham told reporters.



Jack Graham, senior pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano and former SBC president, answers questions during the press conference. (SBC Photo by Adam Covington)James Merritt, lead pastor at Cross Pointe Church in Duluth, Ga., said the issue at stake in the same-sex marriage debate "is not who can get married."

"That's not the issue," said Merritt, who presided over the SBC annual meetings in 2001 and 2002. "The issue is, 'What is marriage?' And we're attempting to do something that has never been done in the history of this world, and that is to redefine marriage."

Heterosexual marriage not only is "the biblical standard," Merritt said, but also "has proven to be over millennia in every culture to be the best standard."

"Study after study has proven that children function best when they grow

up in the home with a biological mother and a biological father," Merritt said. "No vote of any court will ever change that fact. So as Martin Luther said: Here we stand. We can do no other. God help us."

Floyd credited his predecessors as SBC president elected during the so-called "conservative resurgence" for the denomination's solidarity during a civil discussion the day before of a resolution reaffirming the denomination's opposition to same-sex marriage.

"Without these men behind us, that debate would totally have changed," Floyd said. "We would be like many denominations that would struggle in relationship with this issue. But, thank God, godly men and godly women stood when no one else would stand, and today, and we are willing to stand and may all evangelicals know where Southern Baptists are and may America know it and the world know it, and may the Lord be praised."

"The Southern Baptist Convention has not moved," Floyd said. "The culture has moved."

Merritt noted there are certain marriages that as a minister he will not perform.

"To this day I will not marry a Christian and a non-Christian," he said. "The government has no right to tell me whether I have to do that or not, and we believe the same thing is true when it comes to gay marriage, and we will not give that right up."